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Inter-relations between Political and Demographic Change in the 20th Century

Principal Investigator: John Casterline

Global demographic change since 1950 has been the most rapid in human history. Fertility rates in the most populous regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America have fallen to half and mortality rates have fallen to a quarter of their post-World War II levels.

These demographic changes have driven political and economic changes. People live longer and have fewer children. Smaller families lead to a larger investment in children's education and health care. Lower fertility frees women for activities other than child rearing. More people of working age boosts the economy, but large cohorts of young adults challenge the labor market, and large cohorts of older adults challenge the social security net.

Demographic change is also driven by political and economic change. Decisions about how many children to have are affected by changing assessments of costs and benefits, and family values are shaped by changing roles for women. Public policy can also influence population trends.

Despite the interplay between politics and demographics, few scholars have explored these relationships. In this project, Casterline is undertaking a comprehensive study of the relationship between political factors and demographic dynamics across all major countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America from 1950 to 2000.

Among the data Casterline is gathering are:

- **Political factors** including governance systems, government expenditures, civil and international conflict, and human rights
- **Demographic factors** including fertility rates, mortality rates, and population age structures
- **Economic factors** such as income, structure of the economy, economic crises, debt structure, urbanization, and participation of women and youths in the workforce
- **Education factors** including literacy rates and educational



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attainment

- **Status of women** including political rights and social rights
- **Global factors** such as NGO membership, development assistance, and foreign direct investment.

These data come from sources such as the World Development Indicators (World Bank), United Nations Common Database, INGO network country scores (Paxton, et al.), Westernization Comparative Dataset (Crenshaw, et al.), Globalization Comparative Dataset (Paxton, et al.), Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch, et al.), and Political Terror Scale (Gibney).

Among the hypotheses that Casterline is testing are:

- Fertility decline increases the participation of women in politics.
- Age structures weighted toward young adults increase the likelihood of civil conflict.
- Fertility decline is both a cause and consequence of greater civil rights for women and minorities.
- Greater integration in the world political system will result in greater fertility decline.
- Government expenditure on social services is associated with sharper fertility decline, whereas government expenditure on military has the opposite effect.
- Civil conflict slows fertility decline.

This project differs from others of its type in several ways. First, no other scholar has attempted a project of this broad historical and geographical scope. Second, it will consider not only how demographic change affects political and economic systems, but also political and economic factors influence demographic change.

The results will address large and basic questions about political change, social change, and their joint determinants.

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